

Saving Anarchy from the Anarchists

Anarchy magazine has always managed to gather its share of off-the-wall criticisms from a whole range of self-appointed arbiters of anarchist orthodoxy. Readers from around the world have rarely refrained from advising us whenever we overstep *their* exceptionally narrow bounds of good taste, ideological conformity, or puritanical values.

Lately, however, *Anarchy* magazine, its editors and some of its most prominent contributors have been even more viciously and repeatedly attacked by anarchists who identify with various disparate strands of the milieu. Some of the most vocal and persistent attacks have emanated from the creator and reigning dean of Social Ecology (and of its corollary, Libertarian Municipalism), Murray Bookchin. But they have also come from other sources, including Bookchin's partner and sycophantic sidekick, Janet Biehl; the long-time editor and publisher of *The Match!*, Fred Woodworth (see pp. 75-76 of the new issue); a small number of anarcho-syndicalists; and, in the Spring-Summer 1999 issue's letters pages, anarchist activist Peter Kalberer (pp. 64-65) and pacifist Ed Stamm (p. 74); among others.

There doesn't seem to be any consistent, rational perspective behind these attacks. For Bookchin *Anarchy* and its sister magazine, *Alternative Press Review* are examples of "decadent," "lifestylist" magazines. For Woodworth they just *have* to be funded by the CIA or FBI to be so successful. For Kalberer *Anarchy* is just "hot air over non-issues." While Stamm offers a bribe to get *Anarchy* to change its name and never use "the words 'anarchy,' 'anarchism,' or 'anarchist' in the subtitle, or to describe your point of view" because it disturbs "those of us with a more traditional anarchist orientation."

What *does* seem consistent in these disparaging assaults is a general sense that not only are the myriad directions currently being explored within the anarchist milieu beyond these critics' comprehension and control, but that this magazine is one of the leading voices advocating a generalized renewal and reinvention of the anarchist tradition. And, further, the reactions of these fairly incoherent critics indicate that we are doing a pretty good job of making them feel insecure and vulnerable as the old ideological ground (which was never all that stable to begin with) increasingly shifts beneath their feet.

In *Anarchy after Leftism* and "Withered Anarchism" Bob Black has characterized some of these attacks as symptomatic of a more general conflict between the dominant 19th and 20th century threads of left-anarchism and the creative, still-emerging post-leftist anarchist movement. Although there have been anarchists and anti-state insurrectionaries throughout history who have never fit within the leftist mold, until recently their memory has

been largely submerged within a sea of leftist categories and interpretations. Now, with the worldwide decline of leftism, these previous undercurrents are resurfacing and threatening to overwhelm those fragmenting currents of anarcho-leftism that have yet to dissipate.

Over the last few post-'60s decades, as leftism has ebbed, anarchists have increasingly explored new directions in theory, history and practice. These explorations have sometimes led people to dead ends, sometimes to confusion or incoherence, and occasionally right out of the anarchist milieu. But many have led to a broadening and deepening of anarchist critique, and some to the ongoing liberation of anarchic praxis from stale leftist roles and conventions. The most important of these explorations have included:

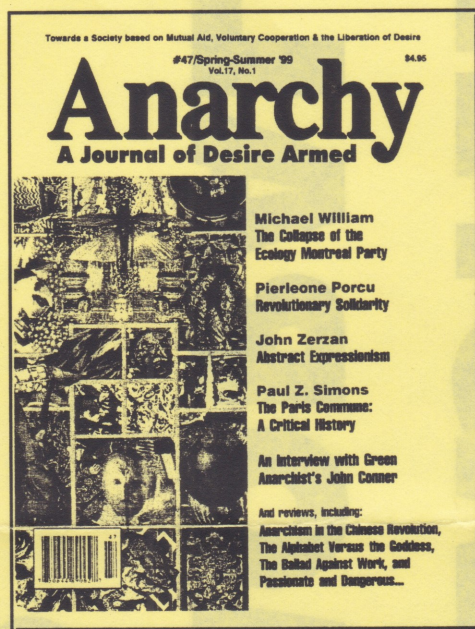
- the critique of technology as a totalitarian system
- the critique of civilization as the primary form of social alienation (prior to capitalism, which is only one of the many possible institutional forms of civilization)
- the critique of work and production (and thus of unionism)
- the re-examination and re-valuation of "primitive" anarchy and "primitive" communism
- the critique of ideology and compulsory morality
- the critique of rationalism and scientism as untenable foundations for anarchist theory and practice.

These explorations wouldn't have been possible without the rediscovery and reinvigoration of concepts, lives and events long lost to leftist academics, theorists and historians because they don't fit neatly into a class-conflict paradigm. Examples include the Whiskey rebels, the pirate milieu, marginal tribal and communitarian dropouts (see especially the book *Gone to Croatan*), and heretical religious communities, along with countless individual explorations of human communication, experience and desire.

A reappraisal of the entire insurrectionary project is required, and this reappraisal has only just begun. But possibly the biggest obstacle has so far proven to be a minority of anarchists clinging to their hard-won, now comfortable niches in the anarchist milieu. They seem to be hoping that they can avoid eclipse if they can just make enough nasty charges, call their chosen enemies enough dirty names, and portray themselves as virtuous victims of a vast, fundamentally evil post-leftist conspiracy.

The challenge for those of us ready to move on is saving anarchy from these anarchists.

-Jason McQuinn and Paul Z. Simons, Editors
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